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## CHRIST IN ART.

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WHEN Eusebius was asked by the sister of Constantine for a likeness of Christ, he reminded her that she could not expect a likeness of his unchangeable nature, nor yet of his glorified humanity. The only possible likeness would be one of the frail human body, which he carried before his ascension. Even this last was unattainable, since the Christians could tolerate no attempt to portray him who was to them God manifest in the flesh. The scruples that controlled that early Christian feeling have long since vanished, and no divine mystery, whether of the Trinity or of the Eternal "whom no man hath seen nor can see," has been unattempted by an art that has at least not lacked in daring. And as one turns from the attempts to picture the Master of us all, one is often moved to feel that the old reserve had advantages that might commend it to these latter days. We cannot think of Christ apart from the transcendent aspects of his nature, but how can they be portrayed? What men mean for strength and dignity often appears only sternness. What they mean for boundless compassion appears effeminacy. Zeal too often becomes mere fanaticism. Or the effort to combine all his characters results in something neither human nor divine, at best an unnatural symbol.

It is generally conceded that no tradition has come down to us concerning the personal appearance of Jesus. Doubtless in the first days the thought of the glorified Lord who would shortly come again, left little room for interest in the form which he wore in the days of his humiliation. A description purporting to come from a contemporary, Lentulus, and which has greatly influenced modern attempts to portray Jesus, is a palpable forgery from about the twelfth century. The so-called miraculous portraits, said to have been imprinted on cloths by Jesus as he wiped

his face with them, and to have been given one to Veronica, the other to Abgarus, are also apocryphal. In the writings of the first two centuries there is not a trace of any description of the Lord's appearance, excepting hints that relied avowedly on inference drawn from Scriptures such as Isaiah 53:2, 3 and Psalm 45:2-4, or from incidents in the Lord's own life. In fact there were two



SYMBOLS FROM THE CATACOMBS.

diametrically opposed conceptions current in the Church, defended by passages from the Old Testament such as those just cited, the prevailing opinion in the earlier time being that the Lord's personal appearance was at the best without beauty; while another judgment believed that he was "fairer than the children of men."

Though indulging these guesses as to his appearance, it is not strange that the early Christians shrank from the idea of a picture of Christ. Their revolt from idolatry, and a care to give no ground for the charge that they were simply devotees of a new idol would operate to prevent their making pictures of their

Master. Furthermore the second commandment was not unnaturally felt to forbid the making of any image of the "Word made flesh." And had they had the impulse so to use art to honor their Lord and assist their devotion, the associations of the only art they knew with the excesses of idolatrous worship, and with the debauchery of heathen life, would make it seem an unfit handmaid for religion pure and undefiled.

Yet the early years were not without some artistic expression. At first the ventures were most modest. On the grave of some Christian, or the stone of some seal, or the walls of a chamber in the catacombs, symbols began to appear. Commonest among these symbols are the fish and the monogram. The fish had the double advantage of representing in itself various Christian ideas such as baptism, and the gathering of the soul into the church ; and of carrying in the Greek form of its name an anagram of many names of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The monogram dates in its developed form at least, from the time of Constantine. It consists of a combination of the first two letters of the Greek word *Χριστός*. A rarer form is a combination of the initial letters of the two names *Ἰησοῦς Χριστός*. These doubtless grew out of a use of the simple X with a possible double reference to Christ and the cross.

To these pure symbols were added symbolic scenes from the Old Testament, such as the history of Jonah, typifying the resurrection; that of Daniel in the lion's den, and the three children in the furnace, setting forth the same fact ; Moses striking the rock, to suggest Christ the fountain of living water ; the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, to suggest the sacrifice of Christ. Heathen mythology also furnished symbols, the most common being Orpheus charming the beasts, to suggest Christ's restoration of harmony to the creation. With these symbols there appear two others drawn from the New Testament, namely the Lamb and the Good Shepherd. This last is perhaps the favorite one of all. It is found on the walls of the catacombs of St. Callistus and of St. Priscilla, as well as in other ancient cemeteries and on early sarcophagi. While the idea comes from the New Testament, the type

<sup>1</sup> ΙΧΘΥΣ = *Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ*. Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour.

of representation is so like heathen pictures of Apollo feeding the flocks of Admetus, or of Hermes the Ram-bearer, as to suggest that the Christians have merely consecrated a current type. One possible evidence of this indebtedness appears in the fact that in some of the pictures, as in some heathen prototypes, a



goat or kid takes the place of the lamb. This substitution was not, however, unthinking, since in one picture the Shepherd with the kid stands between a sheep and a goat. It is doubtless a confession of faith in the wide mercy of the Saviour, and perhaps a remonstrance against the rigor of the Montanists.<sup>1</sup>

In these pictures the Good Shepherd is a young man, beardless, with a classic face. This too was an inheritance from the pre-Christian days. But it seems to have suited the ideas of the Christians, for when we find them venturing on more than a symbolical representation of the Lord, this type of face is the one adopted. Christ is so pictured in several scenes taken from the gospels,—notably the raising of Lazarus, the scene at Jacob's well, the miracle of the loaves and fishes,—as well as in pictures of the Lord on his judgment throne with the books before him. It would seem

<sup>1</sup> See the beautiful sonnet by Matthew Arnold.

*He saves the sheep, the goats he doth not save,  
So rang Tertullian's sentence, on the side  
Of that unpitying Phrygian sect which cried :  
" Him can no fount of fresh forgiveness lave,  
Who sins, once washed by the baptismal wave."  
So spake the fierce Tertullian. But she sighed,  
The infant Church ! of love she felt the tide  
Stream on her from the Lord's yet recent grave.  
And then she smiled ; and in the Catacombs,  
With eye suffused but heart inspired true,  
On those walls subterranean, where she hid  
Her head 'mid ignomony, death and tombs,  
She her Good Shepherd's hasty image drew—  
And on his shoulders, not a lamb, a kid.*

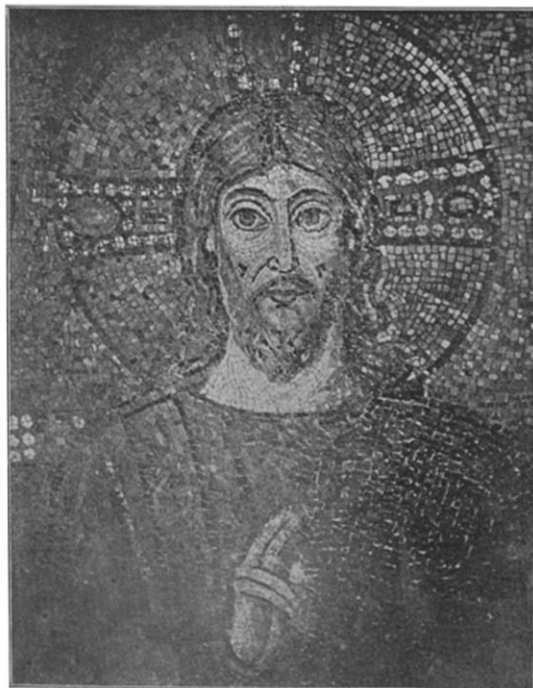
that by this young and vigorous type of face the Christians wished to express their belief in the victorious immortality of their ascended Lord. There is something of exultation in their conception, which shows that the notion that Jesus was without comeliness, was applicable in their thought to the state of Christ's humiliation only. It is clearly the Lord of life and glory rather than the Man of sorrows that meets us in the Catacombs.

The scruple against portraying the Lord having passed, different types of picture became current according as one or another conception of Jesus was uppermost in the mind. We have seen that the early pictures suggest the glorious Lord, now at the right hand of power. Towards the fourth century the beardless face gave way to one with a beard, and of an older aspect. The idea that the appearance of Jesus was plain or even repellant was one that the growing spirit of asceticism in the church eagerly adopted. And as this spirit laid hold on the church's life, a change came over the representations of Christ. Gradually there became current a type of face haggard, full of grief, marked by suffering, a type emphasizing strongly the sufferings and the humiliation of Christ rather than his present glory. This face is older than the earlier type, and is bearded, the hair also being long and parted in the middle. This conception soon became a tradition in the church, and any departure from it was held to savor of sacrilege. It is known as the Byzantine type and is found in most old mosaics and in many old paintings.

The beard and the long hair naturally fit with the notion that Jesus, like John the Baptist, was a Nazarite. These actually appeared independently before the development of the Byzantine type, and, in fact, are now characteristics of the artistic ideal of the Christ head. Some of the early bearded representations of Jesus retain the beauty and vigor of the smooth-faced youth. In the pictures of Jesus, in fact, different conceptions of him found differing expression; and it is interesting to note that the two so-called miraculous portraits represent the rival types, the uncomely and the beautiful,—that connected with the name

of Veronica giving the thorn-crowned man of sorrows, while the Abgarus picture shows a bearded face, youthful and fair.<sup>1</sup>

This diversity of conception was an inevitable result of the loss of all record of Jesus' actual appearance, and also of the transcendence of his nature as it is set forth in the New Testa-



MOSAIC HEAD OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH OF  
ST. APOLLINARE, RAVENNA.

ment. The incarnation, involving as it does the union of the divine and human, is beyond the power of man to comprehend. Much less can he picture it. All that is possible is an apprehension, more or less adequate, of one or more features of that sur-

<sup>1</sup> For the early period see especially Bishop Westcott's essay, *The Relation of Christianity to Art*, in his *Commentary on the Epistles of St. John*, Macmillan, and in his *Essays in the History of Religious Thought in the West*, Macmillan, 1891. See also Archdeacon Farrar's, *The Life of Christ as Represented in Art*, Macmillan, 1894, and Mrs. Jameson's *The History of Our Lord in Art*, Longmans, 1865.

passing Person. This has been proved by the course of Christian thinking on the person of Christ. It is evident in the course of Christian art.

The types of representation are not confined to the two which early became current. The development of Mariolatry carried with it a practical if not avowed transfer of the characters of gentleness and compassion from Jesus to Mary. From the eleventh century on, the Last Judgment came to be a familiar subject for artistic representation. One readily recalls the frescoes of Orcagna in the Campo Santo at Pisa, many paintings by Fra Angelico, that of Michael Angelo in the Sistine Chapel, that of Tintoretto at Venice, and the lurid pictures of Rubens at Munich. At first Mary was represented only as one of those at the side of the Lord. Later, however, she appears in the attitude of an intercessor, seeking to soften the rigor of the offended Christ who, as Mrs. Jameson says, appears rather as prosecutor than as judge. This last perversion of truth has not escaped criticism even from adorers of Mary. But it shows how the pictures of Christ are the register of the artist's conception of him.

The breaking with tradition that came with the revival of learning led to a general abandoning of the stereotyped conceptions that were ruling sacred art. A note of reality entered into it that was fresh and individual. This appears plainest in the representations of the Madonna, in whom human beauty and tender motherhood assert their rights as over against the unearthly mode of representation that had removed her far from common life. Unfortunately the interest of that day found so much more to its mind in the Virgin than in her Son, that pictures of his face are relatively rare. In such as exist, however, the new individuality of conception appears. Reference to Michael Angelo's Last Judgment has already been made. The commanding figure of the Lord, stern and terrible, visiting vengeance on the sinful world, is at least original. If we repudiate the conception as false in its severity, losing as it does all thought of "the Lamb in the midst of the throne," we must acknowledge its clearness and force. The artist has made it tell his conception unmistakably. The break with tradition, however, did not issue in a gen-



uine realism. The Lord, however his face and form were conceived, was pictured in the midst of ideal or distinctively modern and European surroundings. The Last Supper of Leonardo da Vinci, the Miracle at Cana by Veronese, the Blessing of Little Children by Rembrandt, not to mention the earlier and more formal works of Fra Angelico, do not carry us to Palestine and the first century; rather they are altogether ideal compositions, or Jesus is placed in an Italian or German environment,—the general scene, the type of face, and the halo or nimbus with the conventional garb serving to identify the Lord.

In this, sacred art followed the method pursued in all the painting of the time. Doubtless the archæological question hardly occurred to these men. In so far as in painting Christ they were consciously expressing a belief rather than reproducing an ancient scene, the archæological consideration would be indifferent to them.

Not until our own day has sacred art called in archæology to be her handmaid. The modern study of the life of Jesus, in connection with its social and material conditions, has awakened an interest in the Bethlehem stable, and the Nazareth home, the hillsides by the sea of Galilee, and the Holy City with its temple and palaces, as they actually appeared when our Lord knew them. We are interested to know what he wore, what kind of books he read, how schools were conducted in Nazareth, and what sort of service they had from Sabbath to Sabbath in the synagogues. Inquiry into these things has given a whole mass of new material to artists who will attempt to picture Christ.

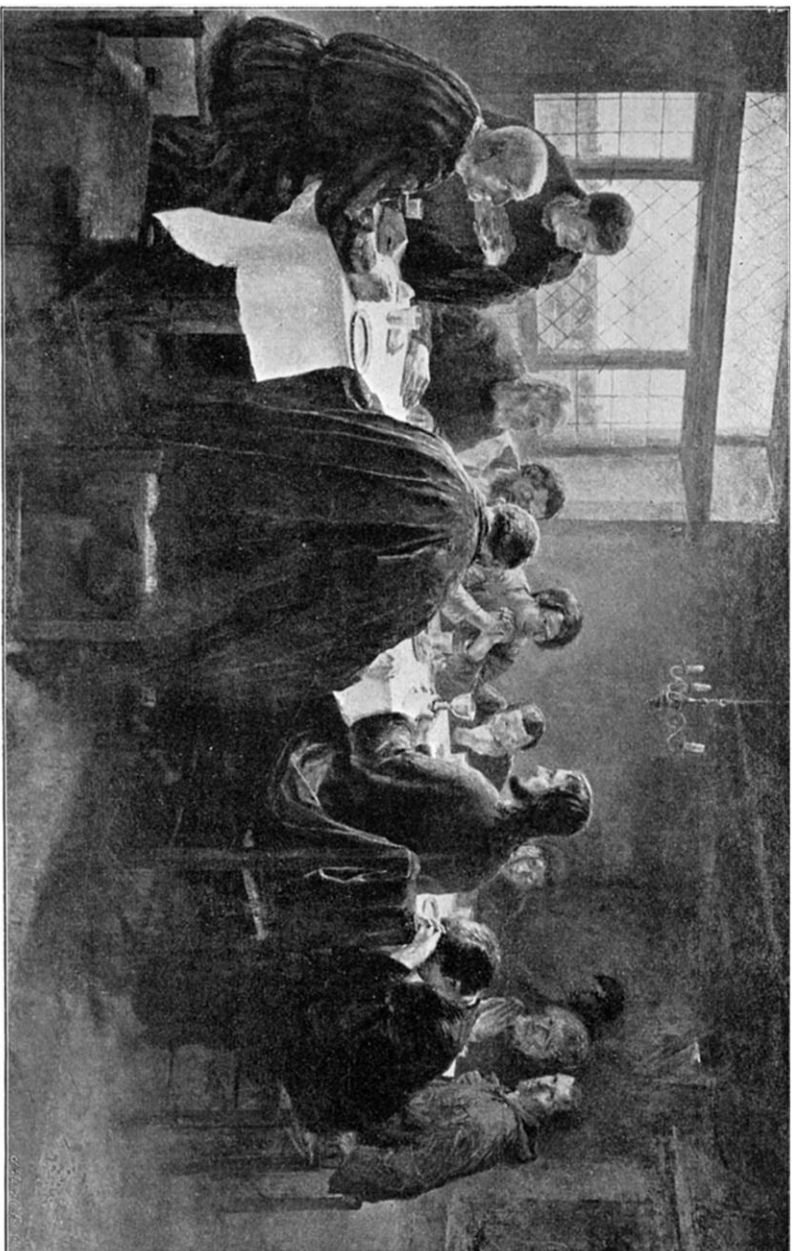
And artists have not been slow to use the material thus given. We now have a picture of the Visit of the Shepherds to the Bethlehem stable, by Le Rolle,<sup>1</sup> that gives a new reality to the record of that first Christmas morning. Holman Hunt spent many years of study in Palestine to enable him to tell the story of the "Boy Jesus in the Temple." The more familiar picture represents the moment when Mary has found him and is leading him away as he says: "How is it that ye sought me?"

<sup>1</sup> See illustration on page 438.

There is another that is known to the public only through an engraving published in the *Contemporary Review* for August, 1890, and reproduced in Archdeacon Farrar's recent book, *The Life of Christ in Art*. It represents the boy considering the questions of the Doctors. The engraving is not at first sight attractive, but it repays study because of its minute accuracy of detail. One longs to see the original. When these pictures of Le Rolle and Hunt are called realistic we must not think of them as lacking in ideality. They suggest at once the transcendent nature of the subject they present, and that not only by the use of the halo. They are marked by a reverence and high spiritual insight that makes their realism simply a contribution to our knowledge of the Word made Flesh. There are other realists whose religious feeling is not so true. Undeniably great as is Muncacsy's "Christ Before Pilate,"<sup>1</sup> fine in its details, and most strong in its conception, yet the face and figure have more of the fanatic in them than suits the Friend of publicans and sinners. Even less satisfactory, though immensely suggestive, are the Galilean scenes of Verestchagin. The environment in these pictures is excellent, and so far as it goes the representation of Jesus is instructive, but it fails to go under the surface and discover what Matthew Arnold called the sweet reasonableness of Jesus, not to mention the more transcendent qualities that no painter can depict, but which may give a picture an atmosphere full of "the sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused."

Even more noteworthy than the strict realistic development in religious art is the movement represented at its best in Germany by Von Uhde and Zimmermann, and less attractively in France by Béraud. The aim of these artists seems to be "to represent Christ and the New Testament events as present day actualities." Fritz von Uhde is called the apostle of the movement. Having resigned a commission in the German army, he studied painting in Munich and Paris, and in 1884 exhibited his *Suffer Little Children to Come Unto Me*. He had chosen for the scene a German peasant's house, and the children that were

<sup>1</sup> See illustration on page 410.



THE LAST SUPPER.  
—J.M.W. TURNER.

crowding about him were German children. All was conceived with great reverence, and executed powerfully. The picture at first aroused severe criticism, but it has made its way into high favor. Mention may be made of a Holy Night, of which a copy was published in the Christmas number of *The Century* for 1891, in which the same peculiarities appear. Especially interesting are the intensely modern cherubs that are introduced into the picture. Prominent among others of Von Uhde's works is a Last Supper.<sup>1</sup> The scene is a German peasant house, the table and its furnishings are very modern, though of humble sort; the group of disciples consists of humble German folk,—plain, poor, but most earnest. The moment chosen is that of Judas' departure, and Jesus seems about to institute the Supper. The grief and consternation of the disciples, together with most loving attentiveness to whatever he will say, are wonderfully set forth. There is much more in the same spirit from this artist. The one unsatisfactory thing in his work is the Lord's face. It lacks the force we demand in it. It is not equal to the rest of Herr von Uhde's conception.

This last criticism does not lie against another artist of the same school,—Ernst Zimmermann. One of the most satisfactory of recent pictures is his Christ and the Fishermen.<sup>2</sup> The moment depicted seems to be that when Jesus says to Peter, "From henceforth thou shalt catch men." The scene is a lake side. The fishermen have left their boat, and the Lord is speaking with the oldest of them, while all listen with intense interest. The Lord's face is in profile, which may account for its satisfactoriness, leaving, as it does, something for each devout imagination to supply. But the serious earnestness, the consciousness of a high mission, that appear in it, as well as the affection and strength apparent in the way the hands lie on the old man's arm, show that the artist has a deep and clear thought of Christ. Much the same figure and character appear in his Christus Consolator,<sup>3</sup> where Christ is seen bringing healing to a dying boy, who lies on a pallet in a chamber pinched by

<sup>1</sup> See the illustration on page 499.

<sup>2</sup> See the illustration on page 477.

<sup>3</sup> See the illustration on page 509.

very modern poverty. Much the same reverence and some of the like power are to be seen in L'Hermitte's *Friend of the Lowly*;<sup>1</sup> or, as it is sometimes called, *The Supper at Emmaus*. It has become familiar to very many through its exhibition in Chicago and in Boston.

The leading French representative of this movement, Jean Béraud, while strong and most original in his work, is not so satisfying. In his choice of scenes and his treatment of them there is an element of criticism of modern life that has been well termed sarcastic. Criticism life clearly needs, but these introductions of Christ, and especially of Christ and his cross, into Parisian surroundings are at first sight repellant. However, it must be remembered that the crucifixion was Jerusalem's condemnation for its blindness and hypocrisy, far more than its execution of a disturbing enthusiast, and that these pictures are a powerful sermon addressed to modern pride and godlessness. The hopeful feature in all this movement is that it is evidently art with a message, and that a most earnest one. It has taken hold on some aspects of truth concerning the Lord, it has felt their universality, and in this way it most forcibly asserts their pertinence to our day, and our day's need alike of Christ's rebuke, and of his tenderness and inspiration.

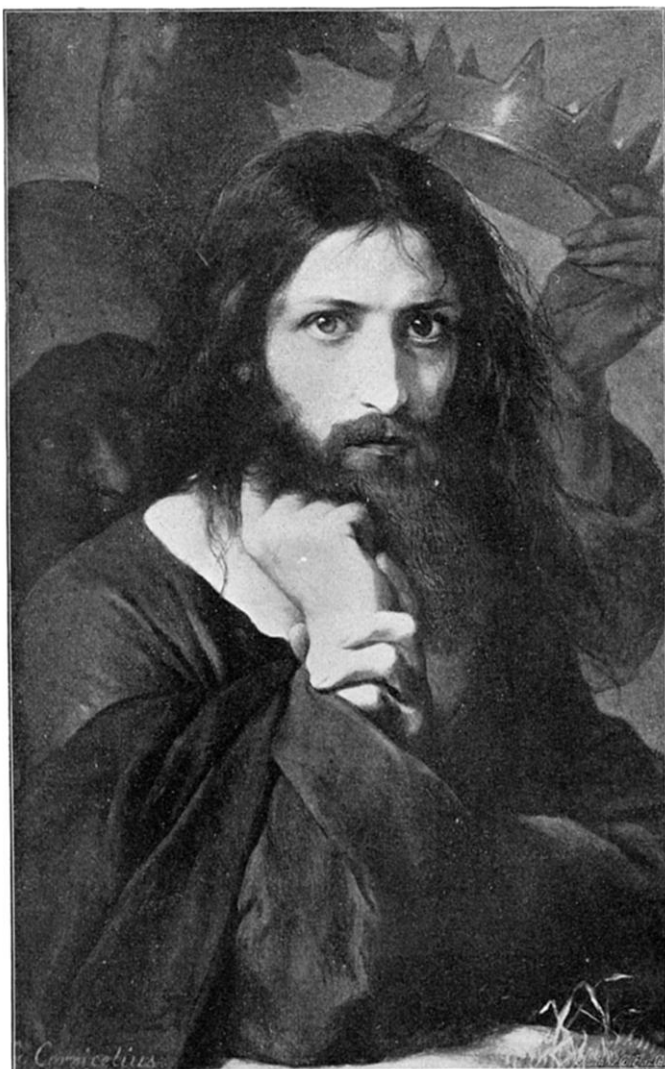
In idea, though not in method, there should be associated with these last mystical realists, a group of men who in method follow more nearly the older lines of representation and, in picturing Christ, go for details of architecture and dress partly to a knowledge of archæology, but more to a fertile and chaste imagination. They may be called the idealists pure and simple. Of these Hoffmann is the easy leader. His pictures are so well known that it is necessary only to call attention to one that has recently been reproduced in photograph. It is *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*. The face is the same that has become familiar in this artist's work<sup>2</sup> and the story is sweetly and profoundly told. Plockhorst, whose *Good Shepherd* is familiar, is of the same school with Hoffmann. It is probable that we

<sup>1</sup> See illustration on page 517.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the cover of this number and the frontispiece.

should class with the work of these idealists also a remarkable picture of the "Temptation" by G. Cornicelius. It is simply a noble Face wrapped in intense thought—note how the left hand grips the wrist—while the suggestion of easy empire which comes from the Devil who seeks to put a crown on Jesus' head, reveals the reason for the intense gaze which tells of battle waging in the heart. The reality of "suffering" in temptation, together with complete freedom from the taint of the least surrender, are marvelously pictured here.

How interesting it would be to consider the work of Rossetti and Millais and Burne-Jones, of the new Russian school led by Nicholas Gay, of Morelli in Italy, and Carl Bloch among the Scandinavians! But the aim of this paper is not a history, only a hint at some of the relations of Christ to art and some of the ways men have chosen to depict him. Such a consideration leaves the conviction that it is well that we have no copy of his earthly features, it is well that different conceptions of him seek expression in pictures. For our lack of an authentic portrait forces a closer study of that other portrait found in the gospels, to which Eusebius commended his Empress. And the diversity of representations forces us to criticise the conceptions that have so found expression, and leads to the discovery that Christ is too large for our full comprehension, and that while our heads are puzzling over the problem his nature has set to our thought, our hearts can largely and freely appropriate him.



THE TEMPTATION.  
—CORNICELIUS.